

Sprains

What is a sprain?

A sprain is an injury that causes a stretch or a tear in a ligament. Ligaments are strong bands of tissue that connect bones at a joint.

Sprains may be classified as mild, moderate, or severe.

How does it occur?

A twisting or severe stretching of a joint is the usual cause of a sprain.

What are the symptoms?

- Your joint is swollen and painful.
- You may not be able to move the injured joint.
- The skin of the joint may be red at first. In a few hours to days, it may look bruised.

How are sprains diagnosed?

Your health care provider will examine your injury. You may have an x-ray to make sure you have not broken a bone.

How are sprains treated?

The general rule for treating sprains is R-I-C-E:

- **Rest:** At first you will need to avoid activities that cause pain. If you have an ankle sprain or knee sprain you may need crutches.
- **Ice:** Put ice packs on the sprained area for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours. Do this for 2 to 3 days or until the swelling goes away.
- **Compression:** Your health care provider may recommend that you wrap an elastic bandage around your injured joint to reduce swelling.
- **Elevation:** Keep the injured joint above the level of your

heart as much as you can until the swelling stops.

Also:

- Your health care provider may give you a device to help support the joint, such as a splint, brace, or sling.
- Your health care provider may recommend anti-inflammatory medication or another pain reliever.
- You may be given exercises to help you recover faster.

Some sprains with complete tearing of ligaments may need surgery.

How can I prevent a sprain?

Most sprains occur from accidents that are not easily prevented. However, make sure you wear proper shoes for your activities. Watch for uneven surfaces when you are walking or exercising.